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## Who Made Luxury:

### The Craft Economy between the Local and the Global

Maxine BERG

#### Introduction

This conference on the history of consumer culture held at Gakushuin University in Tokyo brings new generations and new historiographies to a subject that captivated social and cultural historians during the later 1980s and 1990s. I was part of that earlier generation, and turned my research on proto-industrialization to the commodities owned and made by the artisans, workers and petty capitalists of Britain's industrial towns of the eighteenth century, especially Birmingham and Sheffield.

My attention also turned early in the 1990s to the luxury debates of the eighteenth century: Mandeville, Hume and Smith. My first book, *The Machinery Question* was on the history of economic thought, and I have always tried to connect economic history with history of economic thought. While many historians were searching for the sources of mass consumer society, some turned to issues over luxury, social status and sumptuary codes, individual identities and the psychology of desire and novelty. Out of a reading group on Mandeville and his followers at Warwick, I went on to start the Luxury Project, where I was greatly influenced by Edward Hundert's work on Mandeville and Rousseau, by Marina Bianchi on novelty and seriality, by Neil de Marchi on imitation and effects, and by Jan de Vries on the industrious revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The shifting definitions of luxury were central to the eighteenth-century luxury debates as they are today in the new debates on global inequality and the global luxury brands. Luxury in our twenty-first Century conveys an ability to beguile individuals by playing on their inner desires for 'something better'. Its wide social impact is like that of policies and advertising of mass consumption in the post war world. Now this story of consumer culture is about individualism and self-fashioning. And in our Piketty world of rising inequalities there are several categories of luxury even confining this to objects. There is exceptional luxury: rare and precious objects of the highest quality, made on commission. There is intermediate luxury: objects of great quality, produced in small batches. Finally there is accessible luxury: this is the realm of the luxury brands.<sup>2</sup>

What attracted me in the eighteenth-century debates was the historical turning discussed by Hume and Smith from old to new luxury. Both analysed the wide economic, social and political implications of a growing desire for and accumulation of durable commodities. The production and consumption of new fine goods came to take priority over displays of wealth in land and retainers. David Hume argued that new luxury prompted the 'quick march of the spirits' that went with the rise of manufacturing, the arts and civilization. It directed the passions away from war, violence and wretched excess. New durable commodities were the kind of luxuries, Smith argued, that brought a new dynamic to manufacture. These were the products of productive rather than unproductive labour; they added to the surplus and were amenable to gains in productivity through the division of labour.

This debate attracted me because it addressed these new goods: they came to Britain from other parts of Europe, or from even much further, especially Asia; or they were newly manufactured products, perhaps inspired by the old, rare and exotic, or just newly invented. They were Adam Smith's 'ingenious contrivances' that had 'utility and fitness', and needed more pockets in the fashionable attire of delighted shoppers. I was fascinated then and I remain so now by the skills, craftsmanship and manufacturing processes that made these objects of desire. And it is thus that this evening I want to address you on the 'Making' of luxury; the craft and manufacturing economies that lay behind the objects.

My paper will discuss the connection of these luxury goods with the East, especially India, China and Japan. I will then link this with our recent historical frameworks of globalization, material culture and knowledge economies. Finally I will turn to what is still missing in what we are writing about consumer goods — how they were and are made; a deep history of technology and skill. In our new world of global histories we need to 'localise' the study of the craft economies that have made our luxury goods.

## **Luxury and the East**

A key issue that arose in the course of the history of luxury was its connection with an access to Asia allowed by new maritime sea routes from the end of the sixteenth century and the extensive trade conducted through East India Companies from the seventeenth century. Already, we were investigating the role of the exotic and Asia in European desire for these goods. Indeed we held two Luxury Project conferences on the subject, one in Japan, 'Luxury and the Orient' in April 2000 in the Nezu Museum in collaboration with the University of Tokyo and the University of Warwick, and another in the UK, 'East Meets West' in May 2001 at the University of Warwick.

Since this history writing on consumption in the 1990s there is now a new trajectory through global history. Lynn Hunt in her *Writing History in the Global Era* (2014) summed this up as the history of the process by which early modern Europeans developed a culture in which exotic goods made sense.<sup>3</sup> Objects and other goods from wider regions and parts of the world from tobacco and tea to cotton textiles and porcelain spread into the consumption patterns of ordinary people. Many of these exotic goods were addictive or fashion goods; some were finely manufactured or made from strange materials. With the objects came a more open debate on the advantages of trade and a more cosmopolitan development of the senses. The objects and the wealth they conveyed seemed beyond belief in early modern Europe. The cargo of a Portuguese carrack seized by English privateers in 1592 was valued at \$200,000 in today's money. Richard Hakluyt who promoted English exploration at the time listed among the contents: spices, silks, damasks, taffetas and cloth of gold, many different types of richly decorated calicoes; there were pearls, musk, porcelain vessels of China, ivory, coconuts, and ebony bedsteads.<sup>4</sup>

From strange, exotic and rich, these cargoes to Europe by the eighteenth century were to rise to 50,000 tons a year, and their objects to become so embedded in everyday life that the inventories of the Amsterdam orphanage researched by Anne McCants showed wide evidence of Chinese and Japanese ceramics reaching right through the middling classes and even down to artisans of very modest income levels. In further research she has found a wide range of types of textiles owned by these groups, including some expensive Indian printed calicoes. She argued there had to be a widespread consumer demand for these commodities

so that they were incorporated into budgets and daily routines in sufficient amounts to alter overall standards of living.<sup>5</sup> John Styles, too, found some of these textiles in identifying marks of babies left in the London Foundling Hospital in the mid eighteenth century.

But this was part of luxury's problem. It was associated with the exotic and imports. Europe continued to import Chinese silk thorough the early modern period even though Italy was producing fine silk from the later middle ages. From the later seventeenth century cotton calicoes and muslins joined the porcelain and lacquerware imports. Japanese lacquers were hugely attractive. The Mazarin chest, now in the V&A, is a case in point. It was bought in Japan probably by a servant of the Dutch East India Company in the 1640s. Made of wood, it is covered in black, gold and silver lacquer conveying scenes from the *Tale of Genji* and *Tale of the Soga Brothers*. It is further decorated with mother of pearl and gilded copper fittings.

Japanese lacquerware, Chinese and Japanese porcelain and Indian calicoes and muslins were key imports that also provided models that stimulated Europeans to produce their own imitations. That fascination in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was to be revived again in an industrial Europe of the 1860s with Japan's opening to the West and the Japanese objects appearing at the 1862 International Exhibition in London and the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Nineteenth-century Europeans perceived these goods as crafts made by highly skilled labour. They believed these Asian objects to be more authentic than Europe's mechanized consumer goods. Their perception was part of Ruskin's and Morris's critique of the machine and standardization.

The Eastern provenance of the goods aroused the interest of Europe's savants, travellers, and merchants who wrote into their accounts the customs and manners of the people, including sophisticated consumer cultures. They investigated both craft cultures and production processes capable of supplying large domestic populations and extensive wider world trade in high-quality goods. Pere d'Entrecolle's description of the breakdown of the porcelain manufacture at Jingdezhen into many stages was followed by his analysis of the impact of this on cheaper production costs and higher output. His letter on the subject predated Adam Smith's analysis of the division of labour by over fifty years. Responses to Asian knowledge systems entered European experimentation and production. Asian knowledge not only transformed European material culture, but stimulated key transformations in the division of labour and mechanisation. Eighteenth-century accounts of Asian production processes brought the discovery that the prized and coveted objects brought to Europe were certainly not always or even often the work of single master craftsmen, but of large scale industrial production units producing high quality goods; or they were composite products created out of a highly specialised division of labour between different religious and caste communities.<sup>6</sup>

Imports these were, and these goods were coming into Europe in large enough quantities to enter into what William Sewell has called the 'empire of fashion'. They entailed a whole new role for merchants and designers. This was a commodity culture centred on novelty, fashion, quality and variety bringing new forms of consumption conducive to notions of equality.<sup>7</sup> Voltaire and Montesquieu debated their contributions to specialization and productivity change. Fashion inspired by goods from the East might have limited effects on the economy depending on how wide or narrow its consumer market.

Jean Baptiste Say, in 1803 contrasted French fashion with British mass production (or what he called 'comfort').<sup>8</sup> '[The English] were now fully in possession of that part of industry that consisted of applying

acquired knowledge to the needs of life and had been able to give the products of their manufacturing industry the 'irresistible appeal of convenience'. He wrote in 1824: 'I live in one of the richest regions of France, yet of twenty houses there are nineteen in which, on entering them, I see (...) none of the things that the English call *comfortable*'.<sup>9</sup> Say argued that the British had found a way in between 'excessive standardization' on the one hand and the 'caprice' of social snobbery on the other: 'large-scale production is possible and the majority of products can all, so to speak, be drawn from the same mould. The division of labour can be taken to its furthest extent (...) the result is that these products are generally better made, better fitted together, better finished and incomparably less expensive'.<sup>10</sup> Say's views endorsed the place of broader, deeper domestic markets for durable prosperity. Foreign trade was important but its utility lay in the pressures it created to innovate and raise productivity.

The key impact of imported and other non-essential consumer goods, those whose desire was stimulated by fashion and by addiction was not just on the rich, but on the middling and even lower classes. The middling and lower classes, unlike the rich, changed their behaviour in order to acquire the goods. Individuals and families worked harder and gave up necessities and even food to buy these novelties. Jan de Vries found a way to study this in a concept he borrowed from the Japanese scholar, Akira Hayami, 'the industrious revolution', and then developed into his own version. Hayami developed the concept 'industrious revolution' to encapsulate the labour-intensive strategies of Japanese peasant households.<sup>11</sup> The focus on the household was his own, but de Vries connected household consumer behaviour to work behaviour. He demonstrated both analytically and empirically the wide impact of new consumer goods, goods not locally available, including imported fashionable and addictive goods.<sup>12</sup> More recently he has enquired into the part played in this process by goods from the East. As he demonstrated, many of these goods traded from the East in themselves had a big impact on Europe for relatively short periods, for, like coffee and indigo, they were soon grown in other places; or like porcelain, silk and cotton textiles, they were soon manufactured in Europe. But these were goods that conveyed knowledge. They conveyed knowledge of different consumer practices from tea ceremonies and coffee houses to cotton calico wall and window decoration, then fashionable flowered dress fabrics. These practices contained principles of ever expanding consumption — fragility, seriality, variability. The very existence of the products conveyed knowledge that things previously thought impossible to make could be produced. And the trade and travel also brought knowledge of those production processes.<sup>13</sup>

## Material Culture

How do we learn about those objects which inspired desire and stimulated changes in production processes. We can count them, as historians of consumer culture did in the past, in trade statistics, probate inventories and museum collections. But new questions now encircle the objects in museums, once confined to a 'decontextualised material culture of elites'; they are now a part of our wider histories. The Newberry Collection in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford of 1200 pieces of textiles dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD, made in Gujarat and collected in Egypt and South East Asia now form part of a large history of Indian Ocean trade extending back to the ancient world.<sup>14</sup> Porcelain shards found in East Africa or the cargo of fine porcelain found in the early seventeenth-century Dutch East India Company shipwreck of the vessel 'Witte Leeuw' off St. Helena in 1977 are no longer curious finds and incidents added to the labels of museum collections and

auction catalogues. They are part of a large global story of China's manufacturing priority in the early modern world, its technological achievements and the large scale of its trade with the rest of the world in exportable commodities like porcelain and silk.<sup>15</sup>

The now fashionable methodology of material culture raises questions of cross cultural production and use, and the multiple meanings of objects. My colleagues, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello emphasise the different meanings objects acquired as they were moved over wide parts of the world. Objects became goods, acquiring value as they became part of consumer cultures; consumer cultures in turn were reshaped by incorporating substances and objects once viewed as exotic into the routines of everyday life. The material culture of these goods is about their reception or refusal in Europe, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean or East Asia.<sup>16</sup>

But while revealing connections across the globe, material culture analysis does not go far enough. The goods that are consumed, becoming part of any society's material culture must first be made and traded. The vital production process, understanding skills, tools and craftsmanship must lie at the heart of any serious study of material culture. Thus I turn to the careful research on European skilled workforces carried out by the late Larry (S. R.) Epstein. Massive changes in European technology were, he argued, achieved by small incremental improvements made by anonymous craftsmen. Experiential and collective knowledge and its spatial transfer through texts and patents, but above all through its skilled technicians provided the key to a whole range of new products and techniques that developed across wide areas of Europe. Artisans took cotton weaving and printing techniques, papermaking, glass and ceramics manufacturing, and all manner of metalworking from the Mediterranean to Northern Europe, moving through different technological frontiers over the course of the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. From the east-central Mediterranean and Northern Italy in the thirteenth century, regional technological leadership shifted to southern Germany and central Europe in the late fifteenth century, and on to the southern Low Countries in the sixteenth century. It reached the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century and Britain in the eighteenth century. A highly mobile and well-informed artisan workforce deployed a tacit knowledge, often only codified much later. They moved, adapted and transformed Europe's technologies as they themselves transferred techniques 'in the flesh'.<sup>17</sup>

## **Making and Knowing**

Turning to the production processes of objects of global luxury and global trade must take us deep into technologies and into the local places where things were made. These are craft economies. They include the recruitment and training of skilled labour, and the trade and distribution in the precious and specialist materials from which these objects were made. Design, technical understanding and skills, tools and craftsmanship lie at the heart of material culture. Their study takes us into the local and the global — the local places where things were and are made to be traded and consumed or displayed in global settings.

I turn first to point made by the sociologist, Richard Sennett on craftsmanship. He tells us that craftsmanship is the pursuit of quality as an end in itself, and that 'craftsmanship emphasizes objectification', investing oneself in an object'. We can judge performance by looking at the concrete results in the object. Craftsmanship requires a mastering and owning of a particular domain of knowledge.<sup>18</sup> He writes of the complex skills of making and the years of practice this involves. Using the example of the glassblower he writes

of the 'tried and trusted ways of using tools, organizing body movements, understanding his idiosyncratic raw materials', such that the process of making becomes almost automatic. He wants us to return to the world of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* which he thinks presents manual pursuits as on a par with mental labour.

Craftsmanship is not just about a special workmanship, however; it is also about the consumer. We look in the special objects we buy for a 'back story'; a social narrative of the cultural tradition from which the product comes. The consumer, seeking quality goods, needs to learn to think like a craftsman, to seek out the distinctive features of a product, and to know the associations of these features. In today's industrial world so adept at producing homogeneous products, we seek out those possibilities of distinction. This is what takes place in luxury branding. Luxury goods are sold with associations of place and historical time. Now there is 'brand displacement'; the country of production of an object is often different from the 'country of origin' of the brand. Burberry moved its production in 2007 from the Rhondda Valley of Wales to China. Handbags sold by leading Italian fashion designers may well be made in Italy, but that Italy may be the clandestine Chinese workshops in Prato where approximately 50,000 Chinese live, all but c. 11,000 illegally. Thus even in Europe, a handbag that retails for Euros 400 may cost Euros 20 to make. Specific historical time frames also sell luxury goods. Backdrops of the Renaissance and the French eighteenth century convey exclusivity, excellence and taste. The luxury brands also take over historic city centres.<sup>19</sup>

From our current understandings of craftsmanship and skill, let us go back to the technologies of the early modern period, first in Europe, then in Asia. Diderot's *Encyclopédie* was also the text that Joel Mokyr went to in order to construct his 'knowledge' theory of the industrial revolution. A knowledge economy in Enlightened Europe connected 'savants' and 'fabricants'. The codified knowledge of texts and tracts interacted with the tacit knowledge brought by artisans; both were central to the process of invention and new production processes.<sup>20</sup> In Mokyr's view this was a peculiarly European phenomenon. So let us turn to the ways in which place mattered in Europe.

Larry Epstein's early modern technologies were the result of experiential learning, collective knowledge and experimentation. These technologies were institutionalised through apprenticeship, guild practice, the division of labour and the systematic circulation of skilled labour. This knowledge was local, but it also travelled with clusters of skilled workers who travelled on a seasonal basis or as part of their practice as apprentices and journeymen. It was the clustering of these workforces in specific places as they moved across Europe that produced the 'knowledge spillovers' that benefited the societies they came to. Epstein produces many examples: the cotton weaving that was transferred to German towns from Northern Italy in 1363, with its wares being widely sold within twenty years on North European markets; the papermaking and printing that went to Central Europe with the travels of central and northern Italian craftsmen. Then there was Britain which accepted large numbers of skilled European refugees between 1600–75, and with these developed the most advanced technologies in metal smelting and forging, glass, pottery, and gunmaking; watch, scientific instrument and goldsmithing; wool, linen and silk cloth making; hydraulic engineering and agricultural practices.<sup>21</sup> Migrating craftsmen and refugees invigorated and indeed created many of those industries which were later to take Britain into the industrial revolution.

This skilled labour and its institutions were not bound in longstanding and unchanging practices; nor were their institutions, the guilds were not all about embodied secrecy and opposition to outside



innovation. The Italian guilds tested and introduced new technologies, whose knowledge they spread through patenting.<sup>22</sup> Court manufactures attracted skilled artisans from across Europe and the Ottoman empire, and courts competed with each other. Warfare generated investment in metals manufacture and chemistry. It also drove skilled workforces from their homes. The knowledge in pre-modern technologies was cumulative; it combined foreign and domestic knowledge. It relied on abstraction, experimentation and heuristic rules, but it also required the tacit knowledge of skilled workforces.<sup>23</sup> Thus Epstein concludes, 'The acceleration of technical innovation during the eighteenth century is more likely to have been caused by increasingly mobile and better-informed technicians sharing both propositional and prescriptive knowledge than by an intellectually-driving "Industrial Enlightenment"'.

What the craft economies of these skilled forces looked like takes us well beyond Richard Sennett's vision of the craftsman working on a single quality object. By the eighteenth century Northern European economies were experiencing some aspect of the consumer revolution. Many more diverse and relatively high quality goods were available. Meeting the desire for these required a manufacture demanding a great deal of subcontracting. It was the world of what I once called 'small producer capitalism'. Providing fashionable goods, semi-luxuries and goods where fluctuating demand could be quickly satisfied relied on subcontracting. This putting out also gave access to highly specific skills, know-how and product parts. The eighteenth-century London manufacturing economy was run in this way. Its highly successful craft economy relied on close networks of producers and trust and quality controls among them; in some cases there was face to face contact, in others, parts and components might, as in the case of the watch manufacture, be brought from far away Prescot near Liverpool to the workshops of Clerkenwell in London. Though processes of manufacture behind many of the luxury and semi-luxury products were highly divided, this does not mean that they were not also highly skilled. The proliferating shops selling the goods in Britain's and Europe's cities were no longer also workshops; they might provide designing and finishing processes, but much of the rest of the manufacture was subcontracted.<sup>24</sup>

This focus on skills and tacit knowledge has recently informed the work of historians of science who have turned beyond the intellectual canon of early-modern scientific writers. They have looked to 'information flows' through the 'brokered world' of intermediaries.<sup>25</sup> They have looked at laboratories as sites of meeting of different practices in the testing of materials and experimentation.<sup>26</sup> And they have investigated the connections between the crafts and the Scientific Revolution.<sup>27</sup> Pamela Smith, most notably, has taken this beyond the traditional historical archive. Her Making and Knowing Project at Columbia University seeks to digitise and recreate the experiments and practices in a sixteenth-century book of secrets left by an anonymous French craftsman. The processes described and recipes included range across a whole range of crafts from pigment making, to false gem manufacture and papier-maché masks, and on to cannon casting and metal colouring. Her process of learning more about the text involves a series of laboratories where students work with historians of art and science along with experienced makers to recreate the recipes in the lab. She emphasises the value of hands-on experience as a tool of research and learning.<sup>28</sup> This type of reconstruction of technologies is similar to the methodologies of some archaeologists using analogical reasoning to write about the material culture of the past. These archaeologists observe and interrogate living communities in the regions where they seek to reconstruct the material cultures of prehistorical production centres.<sup>29</sup>



Moving outside of Europe, studying the manufacturing techniques of Asian goods made for European markets in the early modern period is even more difficult. There are some encyclopaedias of the crafts which bear some similarity to Diderot, but few such books of secrets left by craftsmen.<sup>30</sup> The tacit nature of the work processes in Indian textiles makes their study in the traditional archives of the historian very difficult indeed. Another form of analogical reasoning to help the historian understand these processes is to interrogate craftspeople today working in places where globalization is the kind of issue also faced by workers in those industries supplying European luxury goods in the eighteenth century. It was thus that I turned to this approach to understand Indian dyeing and printing technologies on cotton calicoes.

There were classic eighteenth-century descriptions that were provided on the Coromandel coast by Jesuit, merchant and botanical investigators: Père Coeurdoux, Antoine de Beaulieu and William Roxburgh described the processes of dyeing, printing and painting through observation and interview, praising the density of skilled craftsmen as well as key features of water supplies. Later in the century Anton Hove in Gujarat described his difficulties in accessing groups of weavers and spinners who would display their techniques.<sup>31</sup> In all of these cases these Europeans were seeking means of conveying the production techniques to Europe. As Coeurdoux wrote, 'I do not know whether the letter I wrote in 1742 on painted cottons in India can prove any assistance in perfecting the art of dyeing in Europe: that at least was the aim I had in mind'.<sup>32</sup> The French and the Portuguese proposed projects in the 1750s for bringing over to Europe groups of Indian spinners, weavers and printers to instruct European workers, but none of these came to anything. Eventually in 1784 fifty skilled artisans were brought from the Coromandel coast to Thieux, not far from Paris, but this was a disaster and all were returned to India by 1787.<sup>33</sup>

## **The Local and the Global**

This takes me to the significance of local histories in our new approaches of global history. This is something that until recently has been counter-intuitive to global historians. They do study nodes and ports, but there is much less on production centres. Yet we need to go to local sites of production, reception and adaptation of technologies and products. My colleague, Anne Gerritsen has written from the perception of a historian of China of the global historical frameworks of local production sites of porcelain in Jingdezhen. That focus on the local allows the detailed research into industrial production, and the impact of world markets on the people there. Objects are local products whose materials, designs and skills change their meanings with the people who moved and received them in different contexts. The local stories of porcelain and other widely traded objects challenge linearity and universalism, and give insight into the heterogeneities arising out of global connections.<sup>34</sup>

China's great producer of fine export-ware porcelain, Jingdezhen has a historical record as a locally-embedded place of production that for centuries produced the porcelain for the world. Here skilled workers worked alongside Jingdezhen's alienated and replaceable migrant labour forces. The production of porcelain was labour intensive; clay had to be gathered in the mountains at the beginning of the process; the finished objects had to be packed at the end. Workers mastered a single stage in a complex set of processes, some of these carried out in the large Imperial Manufacture, and others in private workshops. This intensive division of labour made it less difficult to replace workers trained in a single process, and there was little care

for workers in the industry. By the early sixteenth century there were 300–500 craftsmen- potters, masons, carpenters and blacksmiths permanently employed in the Imperial Manufacture under *corvée* obligations. Unskilled labour was drafted in from the surrounding countryside in rotating work shifts. Skilled workers, some with their own workshops had to work 10 days every month or three months a year over three years in the Imperial workshops and kilns. There was a further division in a hierarchy between the output of ‘fine production’ and ‘coarse production’ for everyday use.<sup>35</sup> This combination of highly skilled labour and systematic drafting of unskilled labour from the countryside produced over 60 million pieces of porcelain a year by the Qianlong reign, the last half of the eighteenth century. Such great production for global markets came at a high cost to the local population. As Gerritsen argues, this local story of production rarely features in success stories of this global commodity.<sup>36</sup>

This place of production of beautiful luxury and semi-luxury objects using combinations of skilled craftsmen, divided work processes and large migrant replaceable workforces can be compared to another local site of production for a study of craft economies; this is Gujarat and especially Kutch, a site where the crafts also had a long history of global trade, and by the seventeenth century to Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Japan.

Anton Hove was sent to Gujarat in the 1780s by Joseph Banks to collect seeds and specimens of cotton plants and to observe and describe the processes of fine cotton production. The region was well-known as the major source of the world’s finest cottons and printed wares. We can read of his difficulties in accessing both. Other travellers followed him to Gujarat and Kutch but few wrote about the region’s manufactures. In the 1830s Marianna Postans, wife of an army officer who spent five years in Kutch, noted that the cotton cloth was ‘woven of various colours, and eminently fanciful designs’, and she praised craft abilities of ‘imitation’ and the ‘fame their beautiful work has acquired, both in England, where it is now well known, and also in all parts of India’.<sup>37</sup>

What Postans noted here was skilled craft labour producing for all of India and for global markets, including England. The Newberry Collection I mentioned at the beginning of my lecture is a testament to this trade. The collection reveals the wide trading networks of the cloth with markets from before the sixteenth century in Africa and Southeast Asia. We need to look locally to discover the challenges to technologies and skills posed by wide global markets.

The crafts faced the pressures of globalization then; these crafts are still in this region and they face parallel pressures today. My focus on this one locality allows the detailed research on production and the impact of global trade on the people there. In absence of the records of tacit knowledge so fundamental to the crafts, I chose to conduct a series of oral histories among the craftspeople and their families who live in the region of Kutch today. This was my form of the analogical reasoning used by archaeologists. With two local assistants I collected seventy-five extended interviews to provide a website presence of family histories in the region’s skilled workforce. New and especially international markets have created opportunities, but also difficulties in crafts which go back many generations, and workers proudly conveyed long family histories in their crafts. A number recounted a family history of migration from Sindh (present day Pakistan) and Rajasthan. They learned their crafts from grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, but the calico printing workshops also trained many from outside the traditional castes and communities. Newly emerging national

and international markets in the past fifteen years have created new prospects, and those most successful have focussed on design, high quality, and experimentation.

The website with the family histories and detailed discussions of the technologies was made live in 2013. I returned to the region in November, 2016, and visited several of these crafts families again. I found two groups still reliant on local and traditional markets doing very badly, a family of felt makers and a village of cutlery makers. But a number of those adapting their crafts to a global setting, and especially those focussing on the high quality end of the market were doing well.

Accessing international buyers and craft exhibitions especially in very recent years, the best among the ajrakh printing families, Ismail Khatri and his brothers, have expanded to a workshop in one of the villages, Ajrakhpur of sixteen tables employing twenty printers and have plans for studio design and technology spaces. They made a decision after the 2001 earthquake in the region to focus on a high quality product, and relearned old skills in the use of natural dyes and indigo production. Most recently they have expanded out to printing not just on cotton, but on lac dyed silk and woollen cloth. They co-operate with other workshop families in the village, and one of the brothers carries out production of large pieces in the old family village of Dhamadka some distance away.

The most successful bandhani producer, Sidr Craft, applied training in design from the Ahmedabad Institute of Design to produce the finest quality goods for Western markets, but also sought out the most highly skilled bandhani workers to do this. One of these workers, Julekha Khatri, gives out work to and trains 150 other women in her village and others close by. Skilled batik printers until this past two years could not meet the demands of international merchants for batik on naturally-died fabrics because the wax processes interact badly with the alum and other of the natural dye substances. But they have experimented rigorously, and now in fifty percent of their attempts they are successful. They have also adapted their designs to Western taste. The Vankar woollen weaving family in the village of Sarli near to Bhujodi, another weaving centre, produce high quality handwoven cloth, natural dye processes and recently hand spun yarn. Forty-two families worked with them four years ago; now it is sixty. And these are not only spinners, weavers and dyers, but Rabari and Ahir tribal women who stitch the joins in the cloth and do the embroidery and mirror work. They rely on international exhibitions from Santa Fé to Budapest and international dealers who come to the region to make orders. More of their children are going to school and graduating.

In all of these crafts the labour is subdivided; the designing processes separated from the dyeing, and both in turn practiced by groups separate from those who do the printing in the case of cotton printing, those who do the weaving in the woollen crafts, and those who do the tying in bandhani manufacture. These very successful craft families are developing their technologies and designs to meet the market demand of key foreign importers. They must meet the strict quality controls of a luxury firm such as Fab India, and respond to large bulk orders with tight time constraints.<sup>38</sup> There were parallel pressures with meeting East India Company orders in the eighteenth century, and as is the case today this one international buyer was one among many export opportunities. It is on world markets, a concentration of adaptable skills and high quality products that this craft economy has survived through its long history.

The craft economy remains an important part of the presentation of the luxury sector today, and in many cases includes the production processes of those goods perceived as luxuries. A deep economic and

social history of the localities of craft producers brings us to an understanding of the complexities of the contributions of individual skilled craftspeople, subcontracted workers and migrant and unskilled labour in the making of many of those luxury goods desired in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The complexities of these production processes are also there today in the globalized world of the luxury-goods sector, and fine craftsmanship remains central to the question of luxury.

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38 For detail on these crafts people of Kachchh see my website:

<<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/eac/oralhistoryproject/>>. Also see details on some of these individuals in my article, ‘Skill, Craft and Histories of Industrialisation in Europe and Asia’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24 (2014), pp. 127–148, especially pp. 143–8. I also draw material for this section from recent interviews November 17–21, 2016 in Bhuj, Ajrakhpur, Mundra, Mota Reha, and Bhujodi and Sarli.